



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE January 24, 2011

Prepared by: Ellis County Communications
101 W. Main Street
Waxahachie, TX 75165

Contact: Diana Buckley, 972-825-5087, Diana.Buckley@co.ellis.tx.us

Burn ban lifted

With the Keetch-Byrum Drought Index reading for Ellis County at only 186, Ellis County Commissioners voted unanimously to lift the ban on outdoor burning.

The ban was put in place on December 23, 2010 at the recommendation of Fire Marshal's Investigator Jim Pharr.

"The KBDI is currently 391, which is below the benchmark normally used to consider adopting a burn ban, but the potential for grass fires has increased as fuels have become cured and are coupled with strong winds," said Pharr during the December 23 meeting of the Commissioners' Court. "Ellis County has seen an increase in grass fires from burn barrels and other careless discharge of burning material."

Historically, the Commissioners' Court has issued a ban when the KBDI stood at 600 or higher, but Pharr reminded the Court that Governor Rick Perry issued a disaster declaration earlier in the week, naming Ellis County as one of the 244 Texas counties "threatened by extreme fire hazard."

Additionally, Pharr said several neighboring counties had already issued bans, including Navarro, Hill, Tarrant and Johnson counties.

The Court approved a resolution requesting that the Texas Department of Transportation advance the planned and proposed improvements for IH35, US 287, FM 77 and FM 664 as well as other primary and secondary road corridors in Ellis County.

"These particular corridors are experiencing additional accidents and problems," said County Planner Barbra Leftwich. "We are requesting that they move forward."

Another resolution was approved supporting the passage of HJR 56, a constitutional amendment that would make the state of Texas pay for unfunded mandates or absolve local governments from carrying them out if the state fails to provide appropriated funds.

"We are all well aware of the burden of unfunded mandates," said Commissioner Dennis Robinson, pct. 1. "I think it should be left up to the local taxpayers to decide what programs they want local government to provide to the citizens."

Commissioners also authorized Sheriff Johnny Brown to sign a Memorandum of Agreement with the North Central Texas Major Case Investigative Team (MCIT), allowing participation in a joint task force.

“In the event we have a major crime such as a homicide with no suspects or a small missing child – something that might develop thousands and thousands of leads when we have only a small pool of investigators – we will be able to pull on the resources of the other agencies at no cost to the county,” said Sheriff’s Deputy Jason Westmoreland. “The only drawback is, of course, we are part of that team, so in the event the major case team gets activated, the investigators could be called up to go work in a different jurisdiction.”

Westmoreland noted that there are stringent criteria to dictate when the agreement would be activated, to prevent any potential for over-use.

In other business, Commissioners:

- Approved the final plat for Maypearl Hidden Hills, 49 lots, in precinct 3;
- Took no action on a proposal to appoint an operating board to manage the goals expressed within the Ellis County Thoroughfare Plan;
- Approved a resolution relating to the payment of indigent or Medicaid rates for all healthcare and drugs provided to inmates of Ellis County and naming CHM as an agent of Ellis County in providing healthcare and drugs to inmates;
- Ratified the filing of Ellis County vs. Honorable Greg Abbott, Attorney General of Texas on January 3, 2011, Cause Number D1VF11000001-1 after a brief executive session to consult with counsel;
- Approved an interlocal agreement between Ellis County and Dallas County to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of both counties’ efforts to reduce air pollution emitted by motor vehicles operating unlawfully because of fraudulent, improper and counterfeit motor vehicle inspections, for a term of five years.